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Steinberg - Female Education - 1855.

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LECTURE  
ON  
FEMALE EDUCATION.

By Madame \_\_\_\_\_ Steinberg.

PARIS,

PRINTED BY E. BRIÈRE AND CO., RUE SAINTE-ANNE, 55.

—  
1855



Educ 8808.55

1870, Dec. 19.<sup>a</sup>  
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Madame Steinberg (Professor of Elocution), authoress of "Oswald the Enthusiast," an "Essay on Capital Punishment," and other poems published in London, and whose lectures on Female Education created such a sensation at Edinburgh, Glasgow, Liverpool, Manchester and London, has the honour to state that, at the request of her friends and pupils, the following lecture is printed, which can be had at the English library, 66, rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré.

# LECTURE

ON

## FEMALE EDUCATION.

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Love is the atmosphere breathed by God, the grand mystery of the creation, and should be the governing principle of Education.

By advancing knowledge towards its culminating point, the sphere of intelligence would be widened, while it was exalted, and all participate in the beams which, flowing from a higher orb, would irradiate an ampler circle. By almost all, the grand object of education is overlooked, of developing human faculties, capabilities, and character, yet, from the infant school to the university, through all the gradations and diversities of intermediate training and instruction, this is the main, and should be the permanent and pervading purpose of education. We want to see the full growth of humanity, beings unexpanded and uncultured, shrivelled and dwarfed specimens of the human race, can never be multiplied into a great and a glorious nation. It is recorded in Holy Writ, that when the Almighty, in his infinite wisdom and love, was about to create man, he said, "Let us make man according to our own image and likeness." This great Truth, so consoling, so elevating, and so dignifying to man, is more fully borne out in the pregnant expression of the New Testament, "In

the beginning man had the Word, and the Word was from God." Thus, the divine and Promethean spark in the human breast springs from "the Word" originally communicated, or entrusted to man, as that wherein consist, his peculiar nature, his intellectual dignity, and his high destination. "In the beginning man had the word," and out of the living power communicated to man, came the light of his existence. The greatest poet that ever existed in any age, or in any country, the glory of England and admiration of all nations, has excelled every philosopher, in his just and beautiful definition of man. "What a piece of work is man! how noble in reason! how infinite in faculties, in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a God! the beauty of the world, the paragon of the animals." These epithets respecting his physical form, and intellectual existence, are equally applicable to woman, who was created transcendently beautiful, equal to man, in his intellectual endowments, in his reason, in his faculties, "the word" having been also communicated to her, — her high destination being precisely the same, inferior to man only in mere physical strenght and power, which the Almighty has established for the wisest and the best of purposes, and to pervert, or destroy which, would be injurious to both man and woman, and the blindest of all social philosophies.

The neglect of mental culture in female education is indeed an anomaly in this age of refinement and scientific wonders! — this age in which we are so refined, that we suffer nothing to run to waste, and this is certainly a test of our civilisation—yet, strange anomaly, we suffer that most precious of all things, MIND, to run to waste! If the faculties of either man or woman re-

main uncultured and unexercised, he or she can scarcely be said to fulfil the end of his or her creation. This neglect proceeds as much from a bad taste as a false principle, her high destination must be quite forgotten, that she is man's first instructor, the being who has to lay the foundation of his future career, either for good or for evil, who has to form that infant mind, which is like wax in her hands, and will take any impression she chooses to give it. A human being is possessed of a physical, a moral, and an intellectual nature, each of which, during the periods of infancy, childhood, and youth, calls for its appropriate exercise, training, and instruction. How highly cultivated then should the mind of that individual be, on whom devolves the sacred office of "training the child the way in which it should walk!" What unlimited importance must be the formation of her character, the development of her energies, the right direction of her principles, and opinions?

The education of woman is more important than that of man, since that of man is always her work. "Happy is he, says Richter, whose own mother has made to him all mothers venerable, and woe to that boy whom parental unfitness has alienated from the natural fountain of the purest good, and the warmest love!" Whether, then, we look to woman absolutely, or relatively, in herself, considered as a rational, moral, responsible and immortal being, or regard her in her relations to man himself, we must come to the same conclusion in favour of mental culture, high, and wide, and deep, for she who rightly teaches the elements, must know the highest applications, and the formation of character, the building up of intelligence can have no unity, or breath of purpose, without comprehensiveness of view in her, in whose hands is mainly placed this solemn, this vital task.

Education has become the favourite subject of the wisest and the most gifted minds; it has incorporated itself with the very spirit of the nation, and it is defined by one of our most elegant living writers, as "the mind of the present age acting upon the mind of the next." It will be easily perceived how far this machine surpasses the boasted lever of Archimedes, since it undertakes not simply the movement of a mass of matter, but the elevation of that part of man, whose power is boundless, and whose progress is eternal; the raising of a race made "but little lower than the angels" to a more entire assimilation with superior natures, and as it is at length permitted to women to participate in the benefits of an improved system of education, although it is still far too partial; and the kindness that bestows it is by no means sufficiently liberal. Female education should combine more thoroughness and solidity. It should be expanded over a wider space of time, that the depth of its foundation should bear a better proportion to the height and elegance of its superstructure. The training of women ought not to be for display, to sparkle amid the froth and foam of life, and to become enervated by that indolence and luxury, which are subversive of the health, and even the existence of a nation. Men are more deeply interested in this matter than they will generally acknowledge. The proper education of women would in a very short time give us a superior race of men, a land of heroes, philosophers, men of literature and science in every department; we should have a race of men, who would prefer the garniture of their own stalwart individualism, to all the comforts, the graces, the seductions of the conventional. Men, in whom the love of Truth would be more potent than the love of Gain, men to whom the most gigantic material enterprise, the most imposing material phenomena; would be as the

small dust in the balance, compared with the habitual home of their yearnings, their aspirations, the empyrean of the invisible and the infinite! What ought the consequence of her education be, who begins her labour, before any other instructor, who preoccupies the unwritten page of being, who produces impressions which nothing on earth can efface, and stamps on the cradle what will exist beyond the grave, and be legible in eternity.

It is requisite that they who have in reality the moulding of the whole mass of mind, in its first formation, should be profoundly acquainted with the structure and capacities of that mind; that they who nurture the youth of a prosperous country, should be able to demonstrate to them, from the broad annals of history, the blessings which they inherit, and the wisdom of preserving them, the value of just laws and the duty of obeying them. It is indispensable that they on whose bosom the infant heart is laid like a germ in the quickening breast of spring, should be vigilant to watch its earliest tendrils where to shoot. It is unspeakably important that they who are commissioned to light the lamp of the soul should be well instructed how to feed it with pure oil, that they to whose hand is entrusted the welfare of a being never to die, should be able to perform the work, and earn the wages of heaven. As women are by nature designated as teachers, and the mind in its most plastic state is their pupil, it becomes a serious enquiry what they will be likely to teach; they will of course impart what they best understand and what they most value, and will impart their own peculiar lineaments upon the next generation. If vanity, selfishness, folly, and ignorance are their predominant features, posterity must bear the likeness; if, on the contrary, utility, wis-

dom, love, and charity are the objects of their choice, society will reap the benefit.

Education is not a thing of words, of lessons and of tasks, it embraces the widest scope of moral discipline, and comprises all the most elevating influences of humanity; rightly employed, it will lead the child onwards, to become the practical and valuable member of society, it will give the gentle tender girl the courage, firmness, devotion, and self-denial, which the high duties of womanhood require; it will fit her for life (be the circumstances which surround her what they may) with juster feelings, with more cheerful acquiescence. It will assist her in the path of her duty, and render her religion practical. This then is what the result of a girl's education should be, and high and holy, fair and beautiful, would be the vocation of an educator under such circumstances, but *real* education is as far from being generally understood and sought, as such educators are from being found. Instruction is mistaken and substituted for education; a system of words, rules, forms and observances, of mere memory appliances, not *heart* influences, has been suffered to supersede, and in many instances, banish that mighty power for good which education is, but which mere instruction never can be.

Educational power exists alone in, and arises solely from, the moral influence which it possesses; the education of intellect, when pursued alone, is no more to be compared with this influence, than artificial light is with that of the sun; conjoined, moral and intellectual training go hand in hand, supporting, assisting and elevating each other; and yet this separation of mind from soul, of heart, from heart, is, with reference to education, a most prevailing

practice. "Train up the child in the way in which it should go" are sounds familiar to us all. Which is this way in which the child is to be trained? is he to be taught selfishness, his budding passions to be pandered to, and to value wealth above all things? Oh! no, no; this way is to issue in eternity, an eternity of holiness and perfection. This training is literally education: Influence and example are the only sure means an educator possesses for effecting improvement in the pupil's character. She should instil the love of what is good, awaken perceptions of Truth, and elevation of character, and cultivate every aspiration after what is pure and enobling in human existence. To effect these ends, such love, such perceptions, such aspirations should be integral features in the characters of those with whom the child comes in contact. Almost every young mind will be found easily susceptible to such impressions, but with girls, this is especially the case. The female mind is peculiarly sensible to what is beautiful and harmonious, to what is good and great, the natural character of woman's affections, is self-renunciation, and self-denial; her Faith, Endurance, and Constancy are proverbial. Such feelings have a holiness of truth for their foundation, which gives a tone to the whole mind, and it is upon this foundation that the educators of female character should build, influence and example are the only sure means. The great St. Jerome, when asked by the Lady Paulo, "how she should educate her daughter, (destined for a throne)" his only reply was, "Never say, or do, any thing before her, you would not wish her to repeat and imitate."

Truth in its integrity, Virtue in an earnest love, and seeking after it, Benevolence really and honestly reco-



gnising the equality of man before his maker, Charity in no sickly parade of alms-giving and fancy fairs; but active, intelligent and useful, Self-denial; that rugged but honest nurse, to the human mind; should be placed practically before and around the child. She should breathe a moral atmosphere and experience moral influences; it can be proved from physiology, that it is impossible to cultivate the moral qualities, without lessening the relish for sensual indulgence. Infinite toil would not enable us to sweep away a mist, but by ascending a little, we may overlook it altogether. So it is with our moral improvement; we wrestle fiercely against a vicious habit, which would have no hold upon us, if we ascended into a higher moral atmosphere.

The whole system of modern education is one of pure selfishness. To gain is the grand object; self is made the rule and the motive of all that is done. There is no regard paid to the dispositions of the mind, the indications of temper are not properly cherished; nor the affections of the heart at all regulated. The exterior is made the great object of the attention; the graces may be highly cultivated, but they should not be cultivated at the expense of the virtues; the arms, head, and whole person may be carefully polished, but the *heart* should not be the only portion of the human anatomy which shall be wholly neglected. A lady may speak several languages, draw, dance, sing, and play the piano, and yet be very badly educated.

What has been educated? I would ask. Her mind — has her judgment been awakened and guided? has reflection been excited? has she been taught to think of life, as it exists around her, of its duties, of its responsi-

bilities, as they must inevitably arise. Her feelings—has she been taught self-denial, and self-control? Her principles—has she learned to discern Truth, to love it, to seek after it, and to avoid every deviation from it? Her faith—has she been taught to realise it, to recognise as the light upon her daily and hourly path, the practical monitor to every thought, word, and deed? Alas! alas! for education—a shadow has been substituted for a reality, and even in very accomplished characters, elegance usually precedes principle, and if all the accomplishments could be bought at the price of a single virtue, the purchase would be infinitely dear. The education of woman in the present day perverts her mind, warps her notions and her feelings are so biassed, that all her sympathies are enlisted on the side of the opposite sex, rather than in favour of her own. Benevolent men of influence and wealth often promote the views and advance the interests of their less fortunate brethren, but women possessing the power and the means, rarely show their kindness in the way of assisting their own sex, who are struggling for a subsistence; this is one of the unhappy results of a bad education. How frequently is the simple-hearted good girl trained to become the hard, calculating, selfish, unfeeling woman of fashion! And instead (when she marries) of being a crown of gold to her husband, a blessing to her children and to society, shedding a glory around her and shining like a brilliant star in the sphere in which she moves, she is a slave to her pride; vanity, and selfishness, whose children are neglected and badly educated, and whose husband flies from his home to seek a happiness he cannot find in the rapid, unintelligent society of her, whom he once loved, and would still adore, had she not been unfortunately for him and his children, as well as herself, educated to be a woman of fashion! The education of woman would arrest the

vices and crimes of society. Let us just look at the masses, we leave the people to educate themselves ! and that this education is not a good one, there can be no question, it stares us in the face every day in our police reports, which doubtless tell us not a twentieth part of the crime which riots around us. What can we expect from men untrained in the simplest elements of education? What has been their first training? Thievery and beggary ; this is what has been taught them by their ignorant, uneducated and slavish mothers. How can a slavish mother impart moral freedom or the love of virtue in her child? Sir Thomas More, in his "Utopia," says, "If you suffer your people to be ill educated and their manners to be corrupted from their infancy, and then punish them for their crimes to which their first education disposes them, what else is to be concluded from this, but that you make thieves and then punish them for doing that, to which their first training leads them?" Who shall tell the magnitude of this evil? as great, deplorable, and shameful, as the legislative negligence which permits it.

If we desire to see brutality and crime done away with, we must educate, we must lift the intellect to the contemplation of those enjoyments for which it has been formed. Every year that we postpone this reformation heaps upon us, as well as upon the criminal the weight of his offence. The poor must be recognised ; all that is excellent in this country will not counterbalance the depravity induced by poverty and destitution. Our national virtues are few, compared with the labouring class of this country, which is the bulk of its population. Policy, reason, philosophy, and religion, alike require that the poor should be recognised, instead of which poverty is considered and punished as crime.

Consequently pauperism prevails ; a celebrated French historian and philosopher has said that, " that country is badly governed where pauperism prevails." Count Rumford arrested the progress of pauperism in Bavaria by the following system : he had a large building raised by subscription, to contain 2,000 or more persons, and prevailed on the king of Bavaria (who alone attended and encouraged his efforts) to issue an edict that after a certain day, all would be taken up caught begging, — but all, were invited to go to the institution, where they would be employed in any handicraft they may know, or, if knowing no trade, they were to learn —in a very short time, they not only earned what supported them, but they had money to lay by, and became a sober, honest and moral people. One would think that England would in all respects be a pattern to the world, that liberty joined to the spirit of progress, which so thoroughly inspires us, would awaken in every breast a virtue, strong enough to guard our people from the assaults of evil, or at least, to stay their hands when urged to acts of extreme violence. This is not so, however, and the fact is so greatly the reverse, that one is as much puzzled to explain the phenomenon, as disappointed that it should exist ; but the whole evil arises from the bad taste and false principle in not educating woman. She is the lever to raise man to the highest point of moral excellence. While the Hindoos were educated by their women, they were a highly moral, brave, and intellectual race of men ; they deprived their women of privileges (imitating the Greeks) which they enjoyed for centuries, they degraded them, the consequence was, they become degraded themselves, for the moral elevation of any country is in direct proportion to the character of the educational advance of its women.

That great man, Napoleon I., saw, by light of his mighty mind and comprehensiveness of view (which appertains to this illustrious family) the necessity and great utility of female education, for which he was a strenuous advocate. The ancient republics overlooked the worth of that half of the human race, which bore the mark of physical inferiority. Greece, so exquisitely susceptible to the principle of beauty, so skilled in wielding all the elements of grace, failed to appreciate the latent excellence of woman. If in the brief season of youth and bloom, she was fain to admire her as the acanthus leaf of her own Corinthian capitol, she did not discover that, that like that very column, she might have added stability to the Temple of Freedom, she would not believe that her virtues might have aided in consolidating the fabric, which philosophy embellished, and luxury overthrew. Rome, notwithstanding her primeval rudeness and wolf-nursed greatness, seems more correctly than polished Greece, to have estimated the "weaker vessel." Here and there, upon the storm driven billows of her history, the form of woman is distinctly visible, and the mother of the Gracchi still stands forth in strong relief, amid the imagery over which time has no power. In the South-American republics, the first dawn of liberty gave a light, which Greece and Rome (so long her favoured votaries) never beheld; even in the birth of their political existence, they discovered that the sex whose strength is in the heart, might exert an agency in modifying the national character.

Let the age which has so fully imparted to woman the treasures of knowledge, and justly expects from her the highest moral excellence. Demand it, as a debt, summon her to abandon inglorious ease, arouse her to

practise and enforce those virtues which sustain the moral worth, and promote the permanence of a great nation ; make her answerable for the character of the next generation ; give her this solemn charge in the presence of men and angels ; gird her to its fulfilment with the whole armour of *home*, and *heart* education, and see if she be not faithful to her offspring, to her country, and to her God.

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